

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 228 563

CG 016 589

AUTHOR Kurpius, DeWayne J.
TITLE Adaptability of Organizational Innovations as a Function of Eco-System Management.
PUB DATE Aug 82
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (90th, Washington, DC, August 23-27, 1982).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - General (140) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Change Strategies; *Consultants; *Ecology; *Innovation; Interpersonal Relationship; Models; Organizational Climate; *Organizational Development; Organizational Objectives; Social Systems; State of the Art Reviews; *Systems Approach
IDENTIFIERS *Psychosociology

ABSTRACT

Research in organizational development and ecological psychology has demonstrated the importance of viewing organizations from a systems perspective. Organizational innovations are planned, designed, and implemented in increasingly complex and dynamic ecosystems. This paper presents a model of organizational change which was developed using a general change systems approach and in which the consultant plays a key role. The model is presented as an applied working model designed to provide consultants and consultees with a conceptual view of a system definition, an assessment tool for determining what information to gather, and a procedural guide for viewing and influencing ongoing change interventions. The four primary components of an organizational system, i.e., goals, framework, methods, and the psychosocial, are identified and defined. A graphic representation of the model is included. (JAC)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED228563

1982 Annual Convention

American Psychological Association
Division 13

Adaptability of Organizational Innovations as a Function
of Eco-system Management

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

- ☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

DeWayne J. Kurpius
Indiana University

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

DeWayne J. Kurpius

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CG 016589

Adaptability of Organizational Innovations as a Function of Eco-system Management

DeWayne J. Kurpius
Indiana University

Research in organizational development and ecological psychology has demonstrated the importance of viewing organizations from a systems perspective. Organizational innovations are planned, designed, and implemented in increasingly complex and dynamic eco-systems. Planned organizational innovations involve the interaction of interdependent subsystem of an **organization**. Major organizational concepts of durability and adaptability must be investigated and applied in relation to the total organizational eco-system. This paper describes a general systems approach for developing models of organizational change and identifies key principles for determining the role of the consultant in planned organizational innovations.

The planning and design of an organizational innovation in relation to system variables determines the desired level of adaptability or durability of the planned change. Once determined, multiple organizational change factors may be manipulated for the particular adaptability or durability strategy utilizing a general system approach. These factors may be classified into three subsystems: structural subsystem, contextual subsystem, and the psychosocial subsystem. The organizational structural subsystem is comprised of the organizational goals, framework and methodologies. The organizational contextual system and subsystem is comprised of environmental factors including organizational needs, capacity of resources, systemic stability, and other internal and external factors. And the organizational psychosocial system is comprised of the essential human elements including emotional, behavioral, and cognitive factors.

A conceptual understanding and application of these factors will permit the appropriate selection of an adaptable or durable strategy for the planned innovation and the specification of key organizational change factors requiring manipulation to implement the particular strategy. The specific interaction of the three subsystems and particular factors in the eco-system of the organization will determine the role of the consultant. The implication of a general systems approach are discussed in relationship to multiple, alternative roles of the consultant for a number of planned organizational innovations.

System Definition

The word "system" has become a popularized word taking on a wide range of meaning. Chapiro (1981) suggests a system is a collection of parts with recognized relationships which are systematically arranged with a perceived purpose served by the arranged parts. He also suggests that a system is not a natural development but rather something defined by intelligence. When functioning as a consultant Lippitt (1981) has found it is relatively easy to conceptualize the make up of a system as entities of interdependent parts but finds it difficult to "achieve and use inter-system awareness" when functioning in that role. The interdependence between systems and environment is described from an ecological perspective by Rogers, Warren and Warren (1981) as powerful enough to effect behavioral change with or without planned ecobehavioral interventions. A similar point is raised by Barker (1968) in which he states that the application of ecological psychology seeks to predict behavior from nonbehavioral attributes of settings.

When looking at innovations for changing systems Havelock and Huberman (1978) describe the "frailty" of innovation processes and thus view innovations as limited, temporary processes usually directed toward a specific change goal. Other limitations may be the extreme importance placed on interdependence

almost to the point of reaching dependence. Still another limitation is that at times interventions are implemented without knowing the nature and substance of the interlocking parts. Chapiro (1981) believes that merely knowing the words and connections of a system is "counterintuitive." For example, if one takes an in-depth view of an organization a common organization dilemma is the question of centrality of power, e.g. being a cohesive unit while at the same time supporting autonomy for sub-units.

Bailey (1981) proposed that a system formulation that is most helpful in understanding modern society is one that models how society operates holistically on a day-to-day basis. He used social entropy theory to suggest that the process of action in the concrete, living system carries over into the conceptual system. Thus emphasis is placed on obtaining key sets of variables from various levels of the system, e.g. individual, group, organization in order to understand how system information processing can lead to order.

System information gathering, processing and utilizing is essential to understanding and influencing a system in a desired direction. While consultants usually attend to system variables when working in organizations Chapiro (1981) suggests that organizations all too often view systems as a string of events required by people which are administratively controlled. Thus we should not study organizations only as systems but also as interrelationships between people within organizational systems.

Do systems function most effectively from positive or negative feedback? Busch (1981) following a sociocybernetic approach has reviewed Buckley's (1967) advocacy for a morphogenic perspective and found that some systems follow a "deviation suppression" or negative feedback approach while others follow a "deviation amplification" or positive feedback process. Another question raised by Busch is that the human and organizational phenomena are often

treated as if they were the same thus disregarding the difference between structural and human change interventions.

How Social Systems Impact Change

The systems model presented in figure 1 is an applied working model designed to provide consultants and consultees three things: a conceptual view of a system definition, an assessment tool for determining what information to gather, as well as a procedural guide for viewing and influencing ongoing change interventions. As a conceptual aid the model is intended to identify the four primary components of an organizational system which are 1) goals, 2) framework, 3) methods and 4) psychosocial or people. The lines and arrows demonstrate the multiple interactions and interdependence which exists with or without definition in most social systems. The central core called internal environment represents the internal context and is intended to symbolize that the internal conditions of an organization are often unique and, therefore, essential to understanding a particular situation. The external environment is of equal importance to the internal environment but is often ignored. This is especially true of not for profit organizations. The decision about the importance of internal and external environment is based on the power of the forces of each and how these forces either directly or indirectly control both the present situation and the desired situation.

With a broad conceptual understanding of a systems point of view consultees and consultants can decide on what and how to assess the situation to begin the problem definition/solution process. For example, is it best to assess human performance or human satisfaction, human performance or organizational product production, organizational problems or organization successes technical deficits or the quality of organizational problem solving? If the focus is on the elements within the components of goals, framework or methods, structural

assessment and structural change interventions will follow, whereas if the psychosocial component is addressed human assessment and human change strategies will be most prominent.

Lastly, a systems point of view acts as a procedural guide by helping members to determine the cause and effect relationship between goals, framework, methods and psychosocial factors and the impact each has toward the betterment of the people working in the organization, as well as the purpose, goals and performance of the organization.

A Description of System Components: Goals, Framework, Methods, Psychosocial

Goals - Organizations seem to function best where definition and understanding exist for determining the influence of past, present and future events. Goal clarity among individual organizational members is also important. Without goals and purpose members often become less effective and satisfied and tend to substitute personal needs for organizational goals. Goal ambiguity is a common entry level finding for consultants. Sometimes members become enlightened when a simple goal assessment occurs sorting out differences between interpersonal and task goals or when work related issue problems are separated from work related personal problems.

While goal clarity can provide new insights during the entry phase of consultation, a recycling process often occurs which will provide even greater clarity. For example, goals describe some future intention and are often abstract. As other forms of clarity continue to develop, organizational members may want more observable and measurable standards such as objectives, criteria to be used, resources needed and time lines to be followed.

Framework - Goal clarity tends to lead naturally into the policies and procedures which have been worked out for meeting organizational goals. Observing norms which have developed over time can provide cues about how goals, policies and procedures are interconnected or disconnected. Role

definition and acceptance is critical to the effective and efficient functioning of most organizations. Communication practices and patterns are usually coupled with roles and positions and can provide insight into human work goals and problems. The individual, group and organizations understanding and response to intrinsic and extrinsic rewards very greatly. Generating new awareness of quality of life issues, expectations of self and others, ownership of organizational goals and problems are often directly connected to either the perceived or real rewards which exist in the organization.

Methods - What work methods, processes and tools are needed for organizational members to be efficient, effective and satisfied? Is the office problem solved by replacing the secretary or purchasing a word processor? Is it the out-dated technology practiced on the assembly line or is it worker motivation?

Human performance and satisfaction problems can often be traced to methodological issues. Many organizations assume that members know how to engage in problem solving processes or members of the unit perceive that problem solving is primarily for management. Some organizations have discovered new human resourcefulness and enthusiasm with an intervention called quality circles. The significance of this particular problem solving process is that the problems are defined and solved at the point where the problem occurs which has impact on members who want to participate more actively in the betterment of the organization and work situation.

Following from the work of Lewin (1951) and Friedlander and Brown (1974) (Aplin 1978) and others, the three components of goals, framework and methods are considered to influence human and organizational change via structural change dimensions. From a systems point of view, it is important to determine how such planned changes will impact the total system and the consequences for the organizations future. While not underselling the relevance of

psychosocial factors, it is generally agreed that structural change is more powerful and long lasting than psychosocial change Lewin (1951), Alderfer (1977), Aplin (1978).

Psychosocial - The fact that humans are organizations which make up social systems is one rationale why so many organizations rely on human change dimensions for correcting organizational concerns. The sources of social influence of modeling, reinforcement, cognitive restructuring and feedback which have been so prominent in the human change literature underscore the ultimate meaning of humans as organizations and that it is the knowledge, beliefs, values and motivation of humans that is so important to systems definition and functioning. The old and proven "Peter Principle" is real in most organizations but is this principle based on a person's knowledge base belief system, motivation, emotional make up or skill? Thus when changing humans is it best to change internal self (beliefs) or external self (behavior)?

Social ecologists believe that deviant behavior is all too often looked for in the individual when in fact it may be in the group or organization. One explanation for this assumption is described by Busch (1981) following a cybernetic point of view. She conceptualizes systems decisions as "symbol processing control subsystems." These abstract symbols are perceived and cognitively processed by individuals within the organization as an ongoing process in search of a "symbol-referent connection." This connection is not only influenced by self but also by many other members. Thus when self and other agreement is reached as to the meaning and importance of a symbol, reality is believed and the symbol becomes the guiding force within the system. All members stand when the board chairperson enters the room, being on time gets rewarded, small decentralized units are best are examples of either functional or dysfunctional agreed upon symbol-referent connections.

From a systems point of view it is not a question of will change in one component or element of a subsystem impact other subsystems, but what impact will each have on the other and what standards will be used to determine the importance of the impact. Even though defining a system is an intellectual process, it is the shared intellect of each subsystem that is needed to fully define the structural and psychosocial factors needed to meet both human and organizational goals.

The concepts of durability and adaptability of innovations are an important part of the shared intellectual process.

Bibliography

- Alderfer, C. P. Organization development. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 1977, 28, 197-223.
- Alpin, J. C. Structural change vs. behavioral change. *The Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 1978, 56, 407-411.
- Bailey, K. Abstracted versus concrete sociological theory. *Behavioral Science*, 1981, 26, 313-323.
- Barker, R. G. *Ecological Psychology: Concepts and methods for studying the environments of human behavior*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1968.
- Bertalanffy, L. V. *Perspectives on general systems theory: Scientific - Philosophical Studies*. NY: George Braziller, Inc. 1975.
- Bertalanffy, L. V. *General system theory: Foundations, development, applications*. NY: George Braziller, Inc. 1968.
- Busch, G. M. A sociocybernetic perspective on education. *The Signal Path*, Newsletter of the American Educational Research Association Special Interest Group on Systems Research, Winter, 1981-82, 5-11.
- Chapiro, J. What kind of a system is an organization and with what metaphors do we describe it. In Lippitt, R. and Lippitt, G. (Ed.). *Systems thinking: A resource for organization diagnosis and intervention*. Washington, D. C.: International Consultants Foundation, 1981.
- Friedlander, F. and Brown, L. D. Organization development. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 1974, 25, 313-341.
- Havelock, R. G. and Huberman, A. M. *Solving educational problems: The theory and reality of innovation in developing countries*. NY: Praeger Publishers, 1978.
- Kuhn, A. *The logic of social systems: A unified, deductive, system-based approach to social science*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974.
- Kurpius, D. J. OD: A theory and process for influencing human and organization development. *Improving Human Performance Quarterly*, 1979, 8, 1, 217-226.
- Kurpius, D. J. Organization development systems analysis and planned change. C. H. Foxley (Ed.), *Applying Management Techniques*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1980.
- Lewin, K. *Field theory in social science*. New York: Harper, 1951.
- Lippitt, G. Learning as an open system. In Lippitt, R. and Lippitt, G. (Ed.). *Systems thinking: A resource for organization diagnosis and intervention*. Washington, D. C.: International Consultants Foundation, 1981.
- Rogers-Warren, A. and Warren, S. *Ecological perspectives in behavior analysis*. Baltimore, University Park Press, 1977.

Figure 1. A Definition of Social System

